

## **Young bilingual children learning to read with dual language books**

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*ABSTRACT:* This study explores the way in which bilingual children of primary school age who have become dominant in English are learning to be literate in the language of the home using dual language books provided by the school. It reports on how the mothers and their children used both texts to transfer skills from one language to another; to negotiate meaning in both languages; to compare reading strategies and how these vary depending on the language learned (Albanian, Turkish, French and Urdu). The study highlights the positive impact on children's confidence, on their personal identity as bilinguals in a multicultural British society, on their achievement in English literacy as well as the involvement of their parents in their schools. The study identifies the crucial role of the teacher and the school in providing a positive ethos in the classroom, and support and resources for parents.

*KEYWORDS:* Dual language books, multilingual literacy, bilingualism, EAL, mother-tongue maintenance.

### **INTRODUCTION**

London is generally acknowledged to be the most multilingual city in the world, with over 300 languages spoken by the children who attend its schools (Baker & Eversley, 2000). The children who use these languages in their everyday lives belong to many different communities. Some of these settled in the U.K. in the 1960s and 1970s, primarily from countries of the New Commonwealth. Others are recent arrivals, many from zones of conflict or from countries new to the European Union. While their educational and life experiences may be very different, what all of these bilingual children have in common is the lack of opportunity for any formal language maintenance or bilingual education in mainstream schooling in the U.K.

Learning English, when they arrive from overseas or enter school for the first time, is a top priority for families. However many parents, while pleased at how quickly their children learn English and integrate into English schools, are surprised and dismayed to find that they can rapidly lose the productive use of the family language. Depending on where they live, children may have access to complementary schools run by community organisations (Conteh *et al.*, 2007) which teach the language and culture of their community for a few hours after school or at week-ends. Some families are able to teach the family language to the children at home, but are often hampered by the lack of materials suitable for children.

While opportunities for studying the languages of the community as school subjects are still limited, recent initiatives have indicated a more positive valuation of language diversity, with more languages available at examination level in secondary schools (Ofsted, 2008) and more resources available to support their teaching. Although few

schools take up the option of teaching community languages within the regular curriculum, the National Languages Strategy (DfES, 2002) does allow for this in the upper phase of primary schools. A recent official document promotes the value of multilingualism (CILT, 2007) and projects have been launched to promote partnership between complementary and mainstream schools (CILT, 2008).

However the majority of bilingual children of primary age in the London area still find themselves in schools in which thirty or more different languages may be spoken, with little access to any form of teaching in these languages. The children have usually become dominant in English, with varying knowledge of the family language.

The present study was designed to explore ways in which schools that were committed to valuing the languages of their community supported children learning to read these languages by providing them with dual language books. In the process it also aimed to:

- advance understanding of multilingual development through identifying the strategies used by children who are learning to read their languages using dual text;
- explore the nature of the transfer of concepts and skills between languages and how this may vary depending on the relationship between English and the home language;
- explore the impact on metalinguistic understanding and comprehension of reading a story simultaneously in two languages;
- study the effect of the reading activities on children's evolving personal and learner identities.

With a view to comparing strategies, the sample of children studied included one speaker of French (same alphabet and a number of words with common origins), two speakers of Albanian, three speakers of Turkish (same alphabet but with substantially different structures), and three speakers of Urdu (different script and directionality).

## **THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

The work of Cummins is known to specialist teachers of bilingual children in the U.K. and is relevant to the context of the present study. This work addresses issues of language status and power, which can hold the key to the empowerment or disempowerment of children and to their educational achievement. Success for children from minority linguistic communities is more likely in contexts in which the school builds partnerships with families and incorporates the children's language and culture into its curriculum (Cummins, 1984; 1986; 1991; 2000). Another key concept in Cummins' theoretical framework is the Common Underlying Proficiency. Of particular relevance to the present study is the research evidence that the ability to make sense of print transfers even when scripts are different (Cummins et al. 1984).

The work of Bialystok (2001) has demonstrated how the different ways in which the many skills involved in making sense of print (decoding text, using syntactic, semantic and contextual clues) transfer depending on the extent to which their writing systems (alphabetic, syllabic, or logographic) differ. Cummins' work in relation to

learners of English as an additional language has emphasised the importance for educational success of children acquiring the extensive vocabulary and complex structures of language that are more readily encountered in books than in social conversation. Children's frequently rapid mastery of communicative skills has often lead teachers to overestimate their proficiency in English (2000).

While there have been few studies of children learning languages using dual language books (Tsow, 1986; Edwards, 1998; MRCP, 1995) recent work in the U.K. on the development of multiliteracy has explored the language and literacy experiences of children in similar social, linguistic and educational circumstances to those that feature in this study (Blackledge, 2000; Conteh, 2003; Gregory *et al.*, 2004; Sneddon & Patel, 2003). These studies show how children can thrive in complex learning situations. The work of Kenner in particular (2004), of Datta (2007) and of Robertson (2006) show children's growing metalinguistic understanding as they compare and contrast features of their languages. These studies have demonstrated the essential role of parents in developing the language and literacy skills of children and how the particular expertise of siblings and grandparents, as well as that of parents, can enrich children's experiences (Gregory & Williams, 2000; and Kenner *et al.*, 2007).

While schools have been effective in recent years in promoting the "bedtime story" model of literacy (Heath, 1983) to parents through sending books home (generally in English only) and holding sessions to explain how literacy is taught in school, it has been less common for them to be knowledgeable about the literacy practices of multilingual homes (Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000; Gregory & Williams, 2000). To share expertise effectively, to develop a meaningful partnership and to avoid sending unsuitable books home with children, teachers need to know about children's language backgrounds and the literacy resources of the home (Harris, 1997; Blackledge, 2000). Kenner (2000) has demonstrated how bringing literacy materials and experiences from the home into the classroom stimulates children's writing. Teachers learn to build on the children's knowledge and to support them in developing a wide range of writing genres.

## A PILOT STUDY

The present project was planned as a pilot study to identify key issues that could inform the design of a more extensive study. The children were observed for four sessions over a period of two months in a location of their choice (home or school), the Albanian and Urdu-speaking children with their mothers, the Turkish-speaking children in peer groups and the French speaker interacting with the French-speaking researcher. The sessions were recorded and transcribed, with Urdu transliterated into Roman script. Participants expressed a preference for sound recording as this was felt to be less intrusive than video. The recordings were analysed for strategies used by the children, for interactions between participants, for evidence of transfer at the grapho-phonemic, syntactic and semantic levels, for evidence of implicit or explicit metalinguistic understanding, and for responses to the overall meaning of the texts and to the cultural context.

The children were chosen on the recommendation of teachers who had participated in projects designed to encourage the use of multilingual resources in schools. Schools A

(Magda and Albana) and B (Lek, Durkan and Sarah) had contributed to a literacy project organised by their Education Authority (EMAT, 2007) and School C had been involved in an action research project at the University of East London (Sneddon, 2007).

The following section provides a snapshot of several of the children, the context of their learning and the strategies they used. The children approached the task of learning their family language in different ways: with different levels of knowledge of their two languages and different ways of approaching the task of reading and the challenges presented by differences between writing systems. Some learned with their mothers, some with each other and one preferred to teach herself. All of the children in the sample had benefited from some targeted support for their literacy in English.

### **Lek and Durkan reading in Turkish**

Lek and Durkan spoke Turkish and English at home with their parents and had briefly attended a Turkish complementary class where they had learned to decode text, but had found the work boring and dropped out. They explained to me that they only had worksheets to learn from. They were aged 8 when I met them. They had encountered dual language texts in Turkish and English in a reading support session and had got really excited about them. They asked their teacher if they could help each other to read the Turkish text. And so she invited me to observe them work together.

While I had strong reservations about working with the children in a language I don't know, unaccompanied by an adult speaker, I soon realised that, in this case, it was a great bonus. The children became the experts. As they negotiated and argued about pronunciation and meaning and explained the story to me, they revealed the strategies they used to make sense of print in both languages and their understanding of how their languages worked.

Lek and Durkan had limited reading skills in both languages, but a great love of stories and a determination to read the dual language version of *The giant turnip* (Barkow, 2001) in its entirety. They deployed an impressive range of strategies in their reading task.

Durkan's decoding skills were a little better in Turkish, Lek's in English. As they took turns at reading, a pattern emerged: when one intervened to correct the other, they would read on together.

Lek read: *Yazda çocuklar bitki...bitki*, Durkan corrected: *bitkiler*. They both read on: *bitkileri besleyip suladılar. Ve tüm yaban otları söktüler*. (In the summer the children fed and watered the plants. And pulled out all the weeds).

They read the Turkish first, using all the resources offered by the illustrations, and their knowledge of story structure, remembering the particular turnip story they knew, predicting what might happen, embroidering it a little, adding comments from personal experience. The following section shows them collaborating to decode and work out the meaning of the text. Durkan read the Turkish on page 10 with some help from Lek:

“*Veya bir vinçle onu kaldırılabiliriz diye önerdi Ta... Ta...*

(Lek: “He said that wrong.”) ... önerdi (Lek: “Yeah, that’s it.”) *Tarik* (Or we could get a crane to lift it, suggested Tariq).

Lek suggests “*Tarak* is something like you do your hair” (*tarak* means comb in Turkish). Then Durkan, cued by the illustration of a mechanical digger, offers an alternative: “*Tarak* is something like there’s a machine and it goes (makes tapping noise on the table) ... like that”. After a discussion about the meaning of *kaldırabiliriz*, which Lek works out means “to pick up”, Durkan solves the Tarik mystery by referring to the English text. “I think he’s called Tarik.”

After reading a page in both languages, Lek explained to me how the words were ordered in a different way:

That means I (pointing to *ben*) and that means *biliyorum*, that know, and *dedi* is words and *Kieran* is like, a name for Kieran, and *helikopter* is helicopter and *çekerek* I think it is could and this one is (the last word, *çıkartabiliriz*) is pulled.

Explaining the distinctive morphology of Turkish was a greater challenge, but they tried to work it out for me. Lek read in Turkish:

*Ama şalgamı görünce gözlerine inanamadılar! Bir zürafadan, zürafadan daha uzun ve bir filden daha genişti.* (But when they saw the turnip, they could hardly believe their eyes! It was taller than a giraffe, and wider than an elephant.)

Then they both tried to explain that “elephant” is *fil*, or was it *filden*? They argued. “*fil* is not, *filden* is not, I think ... *fil* is an elephant”. Lek explored the word, “*fil* is an elephant, but *filden* is like, it can be flower or another big elephant, or another big one.” Durkan agreed that *filden* meant bigger. Lek mused: “*filde*, smaller, but *filde*, you add *-en* and it gets bigger.” The session ended with a spontaneous and lively performance of hand clapping rhymes in Turkish and advice to me on how I could best learn their language.

### Magda and Albana learning in Albanian

Magda and Albana, both 6 years old, were best friends in their Year 1 class when they were observed reading with their mothers. They were both born in Britain of parents recently arrived from Albania. Their teacher valued their bilingualism and had equipped her class with dual language picture books and CDs in nine languages. She lent them to parents and discussed with them how they could be used. The books also featured in her regular teaching of reading in English. Having the same text in so many different languages enabled her to talk knowledgeably to the children about their reading at home even though she could only speak one of the children’s home languages (Punjabi). As Magda and Albana were fairly new to English, she also ensured they had some additional support in the class for reading with understanding (Sneddon, 2008). Her expectations of the girls were high.

The two mothers and their daughters chose to work together. Both mothers, neither of whom was fully proficient in English, reported that, although both worked hard to maintain the language in the home, their daughters were using Albanian less and less. Albana in particular was rapidly losing the active use of the language. The girls had little opportunity to meet with other Albanian children and the parents had no suitable

books at home to read to the children. The dual language books from school were met with enthusiasm.

At the point where I observed them, the girls were reading fluently in English and had learned to decode text in Albanian. Magda described how her mother had explained the different sounds represented by some of the letters and how she used fridge magnets to help her learn new words. The transfer of skills was much in evidence as both girls used their knowledge of blending sounds in English to read Albanian. This process was facilitated by the regularity of the sound-symbol correspondence. Albana's mother commented on how difficult she found the process in English. A problem for the girls in Albanian was the length of words and knowing where to apply the stress.

Magda's first chosen book was *Handa's hen* (Brown, 2002). She decoded slowly and carefully, her mother discreetly supporting her when she made mistakes, asking about the meaning of key words: *gjyshja* (Grandma), *shoqen* (friends), *më ndihmo* (help me). Magda read:

"*Handa dhe Akeyo pane rrëth koteçit te pulave*" (Page 3: Handa and Akeyo hunted round the hen house.).

Magda's mother: "what is *rrëth koteçit*?"

Magda: "round hunted".

Mother: "what does it mean in English?"

Magda: "It's like when you go somewhere and you look for, like, when you go shopping ... and they were hunting to look for Mondi."

Mother attempts to correct: "No, hunted, it means, when the hen is leaving...."

She is struggling with an explanation in English, but confirms that the Albanian expression could be used to refer to "hunting around the house for something."

She then asks: "Did you understand the story, Magda?" "Not too much." They agree Magda needs to read the story again. She came back to the text the following week and read it with confidence and expression in both languages. When she found words that were unfamiliar in both languages, she used the whole context in Albanian, then looked at the English, then used the illustrations to work out the meaning of *gëlltitur* (swallows) and to explain to her mother that *trishtuara* meant "feeling sad".

Albana used similar strategies. When she read *Not again Red Riding Hood* (Clynes & Daykin, 2003) she got involved in a complex negotiation of meaning with her mother as neither of them knew the word *përvoje* (translated as "ordeal") in either language. She read and re-read texts till she could confidently retell the story and answer her mother's questions. As both girls progressed through their reading, their vocabulary grew in both languages. Albana's mother exclaimed proudly, "She knows words in Albanian that I don't know!"

Magda and Albana became very committed to developing their skill and the following year started writing, with their mothers' help, keeping holiday diaries in both languages which they aimed to turn into their own dual language books.

## Myadda learning Urdu

Myadda was also born in London and was 7 years old when her mother started reading with her. Her mother was highly literate in both English and Urdu and was very keen for her to learn Urdu. She spoke the language to her at home, but Myadda's father was primarily a Punjabi speaker and the parents did not use much Urdu together. Myadda tended to respond in English. Myadda's school also valued home languages and her mother was a regular visitor at the school, telling stories in Urdu to children who spoke the language. The school library had a strong collection of dual language books and parents were encouraged to read them with their children.

Myadda was interested in Urdu but her mother reported that, although her reading in English was good, she didn't like reading and that she would rarely sit with a book for more than ten minutes. Myadda loved listening to her mother's traditional stories in Urdu, understood most of them, enjoyed the rhythm of the language but struggled to retell them as even quite common words eluded her.

When she started reading with her mother in the summer term, she worked from *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, what do you see?* (Martin, 2004), a text that makes language learning easy because of the repetition of simple phrases and the strong support from the illustrations. Myadda's mother covered up the English text, read in Urdu, pointing out words and focusing on the sound of initial letters. Myadda was good at guessing and her mother was not so happy with this:

Look at it and try to read it, not guess it. Where's *mujay*? I can't see any *meem*. It's *toomay*. I know it's a bit difficult this word, but if you break the letters and try to sound them out like you do in English, it will be easier.

At this point Myadda was just not familiar enough with the Urdu letters to do much decoding herself and she was finding the reading difficult. Using a combination of the few letters she knew, the strategies she had for decoding English and her memory of repeated phrases, she gradually gained in confidence, so that by the time she reached page 17 she was able to work out *sunehri matcheli, sunehri matcheli, toomay kya nazaraa raha hai* (goldfish, goldfish, what do you see?).

The sessions with Myadda were not completed before the summer holiday. During the holiday, her grandmother and cousins came from Pakistan. Myadda played with her cousins in Urdu. Crucially her grandmother brought an Urdu primer and sat with Myadda for a short while several times a week. The book has a page for each letter; the sound is illustrated in the traditional manner with a range of objects starting with the letter and children's rhymes that incorporate the words. Myadda's mother explained how the book works: "They learn it more by heart than they read it, then, when they learn them (the rhymes), they work out how to read them". Myadda promptly demonstrated:

She read "a", "adab" (a greeting), "aam", (a mango). Then she read with expression the rhyme that she knows by heart: "*alu kachalu mian khahan gaye they, subzi ki tokri me so rahay they, bengun ne laat mari ropare they, gajar ne lat mara hanspare they.*"

(Mr potato where have you been? I was sleeping in the vegetable basket, the aubergine kicked me and I started to cry, the carrot comforted me and I started to laugh.)

Myadda loved the primer. She recognised rhymes she had heard from her mother. The letter shapes started to make sense. At the next session she read the headings under the pictures: *suraj* (sun) *saaras* (crane). She read an unfamiliar rhyme, fluently and confidently: *Suraj mashriq say nikalta he sab sukhko baant* (the sun rises from the east and spreads happiness). Her mother asked: “Do you know what *suraj* means? Myadda was confident: “the sun”. “And do you know what *Suraj mashriq say nikalta he* is? What is *mashriq*?” Myadda didn’t know. Mother: “East. *Nikalta he*, what does that mean? Ashna “comes out. The *suraj*, the sun, is inside the *mashriq*, and it comes out.” Her mother rephrased: “The sun rises from the east.”

While working with her mother on dual language books was the starting point for Myadda’s interest in learning to read Urdu, the visit from her family in Pakistan marked a turning point. By providing an environment in which speaking Urdu became essential, it increased both her motivation and her opportunities to improve her language skills. From the point of view of learning to read, the primer provided by her grandmother was the essential tool she needed to transfer her decoding skills from English to Urdu. As suggested by Bialystok’s (2001) work, understanding the very different writing system provided Myadda with a greater challenge than that which faced the other children in the study.

### Sarah learning to read in French

When I met her, Sarah was 9 years old. She was born in London to parents who originate from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She has cousins in France and Belgium, whom she occasionally visits. Talking to Sarah, who has a slightly shy and quiet manner, I was struck at how confident she was about language and literacy. She speaks fluent English and French and understands Lingala, a language of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although she told me her strongest language was English, she mostly spoke to me in French. She explained that she had taught herself to read in French:

*J'ai appris à lire en Français d'abord. J'ai appris toute seule parce qu'ils me montraient seulement des mots et puis j'avais acheté des petits livres que mes cousins avaient envoyés de Belgique.* (I learned to read in French first. I taught myself because they [her parents] showed me words and then I had bought little books that my cousins sent me from Belgium.)

Her teacher told me that she could decode English text with confidence in her Reception class and was now an advanced reader for her age. Sarah was delighted to encounter dual language books in school as she currently had little to read at home in French. Her teacher was proud of her skills and invited me to meet her. When she read to me from several dual language books, she read fluently in both languages, occasionally mispronouncing verbs in the past tense in French. Her main strategy was to read the text in French and use the context to work out any unfamiliar words. She would then check with the English. When the word was unfamiliar in both languages she re-read both texts, checked with the illustrations, and invariably offered a meaning that made complete sense in context. For example, for *ménestrel*, after checking the

illustrations, she offered, “*Des ménestrels c'est des gens qui jouent de la guitare et tout*” (Minstrels are people who play the guitar and stuff) (Barkow, 2002). In the more demanding text (without illustrations) of *Little women* (Alcott, 1994), Sarah read:

“*Et moi qui aurait tant voulu de nouvelles partitions! Murmura Beth.*” (Page 10: translated as: “I planned to spend mine on new music,’ said Beth.”) For “*nouvelles partitions*”, Sarah suggested: “Beth likes music. Is it new music? A tape?” She read the page again: “I think it’s the text of the songs and the notes.”

With simpler text, she appeared to be a very balanced bilingual, but when we moved on to texts more suitable for her reading ability, the English dominance was more apparent. As Sarah read in parallel *Little women* in both English and French versions (in separate volumes), she enjoyed noting how, in this more sophisticated text, the French version sometimes expressed things differently and offered: “When you’re translating, some words might not have the same meaning.” She was delighted to find how metaphors and similes were translated and immediately understood that a *rat de bibliothèque* (library rat) was a bookworm.

However, it was in the re-telling of a dual language version of the *Pied Piper of Hamelin* (Barkow, 2004) that the impact on Sarah of reading a story in two languages really emerged. She retold the tale in both languages. Her English version was more detailed, but both were broadly similar until she started developing the story beyond the text in the book. In both her versions, the children moved to a new town and missed their parents: in the English one they expressed a wish to return to their parents but were prevented from doing so by the Piper; in the French one they just wondered whatever had happened to their parents. At this point in her narrative, where the English story ended, Sarah developed a dramatic twist in the French version, exploring the theory that the Pied Piper was the greater villain, that he had brought the rats in the first place and ruthlessly blackmailed and exploited the community to satisfy his own greed for money.

Put together, the two stories, developed in parallel through two languages, provided a dramatic and sophisticated exploration of a traditional moral tale which ends in tragedy, since Sarah avoided the happy ending that many children like to add when extending such stories. It is an interesting question as to whether the “binocular vision” on the story that Sarah’s bilingualism provided enabled her to probe more deeply into the underlying meaning of the tale.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The outcomes of reading simultaneously in two languages appear to have been positive for all the children involved. They had in common a high level of motivation and pride in their achievements.

The first aim of the pilot study was to identify strategies used by the children as they read two texts simultaneously. All were transferring the strategies they had been taught for reading in English to understand the text in the less familiar language, though they varied in the extent to which they used the English text in the process.

This process of transfer of skills and concepts, the second aim of the pilot study, was much in evidence. With respect to decoding skills, all of the children were strong on grapho-phonic skills. They could identify sounds and, for those working in the Roman alphabet, there was no evidence of confusion between languages about the sound values of the letters. The occasionally painstaking work of Magda or Lek shows them using what they had learned in English to blend sounds and decode unfamiliar words in Albanian and Turkish.

Although their levels of reading skill were very different (Sarah being the strongest reader and Durkan the weakest), they all had strategies for working out the meaning of unknown words. A criticism made of using dual language texts for learning to read is that children will read only the easier language (MRCP, 1995). This was not borne out in this study: the children all chose to work initially from the non-English text, using the illustrations, their knowledge of the particular story or of stories in general, discussing meaning with their mothers or each other. Magda, Albana and Sarah used the English to check their interpretations, Myadda did this as a last resort. These strategies enabled them to learn new words in both languages: *ordeal* and *përvoje*, *minstrel* and *ménestrel*. Prediction and a strong engagement with the story was also a feature of some of the children's work: Lek in particular enjoyed discussing what was going to happen, using the illustrations as a guide and relating the story to his personal experience. Sarah developed two sequels to the Pied Piper story as well as a "prequel", speculating that the Piper may have been responsible for bringing the rats to Hamelin in the first place. The use of these strategies suggests that the children all understood a great deal about the reading process, loved stories and had become, or were becoming, independent readers.

As predicted from the work of Bialystok (2001), the task of simultaneous reading was very different for Myadda, and while her predictive skills were in evidence at the start of the study, she became very strongly focused on the process of decoding the script, which presented a huge challenge for her. The Urdu primer provided by her grandmother was an essential tool that enabled her to transfer her phonic skills from English to Urdu and working from it was one of her great pleasures. It is possible that her less confident knowledge of Urdu affected her ability to use "top-down" strategies as effectively as Magda or Sarah.

With respect to the third aim of the study, the development of metalinguistic understanding was most explicitly in evidence in the work of Lek, who was keen to explain to the researcher the ways in which Turkish was different from English at both the level of word and of sentence structure. Myadda still seemed a little puzzled by the differences in word order and the implications for translation. Magda, Albana and Sarah were the most comfortable and fluent in both languages and moved seamlessly from one to the other, with Sarah focusing on underlying meaning and the translation of metaphors.

The impact on understanding of reading a story in two languages was most in evidence in Sarah's case, as she created a context in both languages for the Pied Piper story that included what happened before and after. This indicated a sophisticated exploration of the issues raised in the actual text and may well have been suggested by the simultaneous reading in two languages, although this issue would benefit from further investigation with fluent readers like Sarah.

With respect to the impact of the pilot study on personal and learner identity, much of the evidence came from observations, from comments made by mothers and teachers and by events that occurred outside of the observation sessions. All of the children in the sample were well integrated into and at ease with the English culture of the school. The children's teachers commented on their developing pride and confidence as readers as well as in the culture of the home as the dual language projects progressed. Myadda rediscovered the pleasures of hearing stories and poems in Urdu. In asides during the observation session, Lek and Durkan talked to me excitedly about computer games which they had in Turkish as well as a special drink made from turnips that could only be found in Turkish shops. At the end of the session, they competed to show me which of them knew the most hand-clapping rhymes in Turkish. Magda and Albana in particular were later offered opportunities to read poems in Albanian and perform traditional dances in public. Their pride and confidence resulted in invitations to perform in a range of venues and greatly raised their status in the school. When an Albanian club was launched the following year in their school, a number of non-Albanian children joined. While Sarah was more reserved, she was delighted that her father has started exploring bookshops in London to find suitable books for her in French.

Observations in school and interviews with teachers revealed the value they placed on children's language and culture. As predicted by Cummins' empowerment model, this appeared to have an impact on the children's achievement and their identities as learners of English, producing a very high level of motivation. Magda and Albana were proud of having moved into the top reading group in their class for English in the course of their first year of learning Albanian. Reading was not easy in any language for Lek and Durkan, but they practised sophisticated strategies and discovered the pleasures and advantages of a collaborative approach, as well as the rewards of persistence which translated into greater success in English. Although she was still a long way from reading Urdu text unaided, Myadda enjoyed the challenge of the script. As a result she greatly expanded her attention span and her interest in reading in English. Sarah kept looking for ever more challenging texts in both languages and was far ahead of her class in her reading and writing skills in English.

The provision of dual language books by the school signalled to parents and children the importance of valuing and developing their bilingual heritage. Magda, Albana, and, to a more modest extent, Lek and Durkan, learned to read their home languages using the books. Myadda needed the additional material provided by her grandmother to address the differences in writing systems. Sarah's skills developed very rapidly and she soon outgrew the available dual texts, becoming a fully independent reader in both languages. The children's high level of motivation encouraged their parents to find more opportunities for them to practise the language and more texts for them to read.

This necessarily brief account of a complex study cannot provide a full analysis of all the implications of the pilot study for future research. One noticeable point that emerges from the data is that, while interaction with an adult progressed children's reading skills in the same way as Kenner found (2004), it was the interaction between children (Lek and Durkan) that revealed their understanding of how their two languages work. A future study funded to provide researchers bilingual in all the

children's languages could probe much more deeply into the children's metalinguistic understanding.

Cummins' model of empowerment reveals the importance of teachers' roles, and this was borne out by the pilot study. Their role proved to be crucial. The encouragement they provided to learn the home language resulted in a close relationship between parents and the schools which, in the case of the Albanian mothers, improved their own English skills and resulted in both of them embarking on voluntary work in the school and studies leading to qualifications as teaching assistants. This small-scale study has identified ways in which teachers (and indeed researchers) who do not share the languages of the children can still provide opportunities for children to develop as additive bilinguals, widening their linguistic range from the everyday use in the home to the language of books. They provide spaces where evolving heritage identities can be explored, shared and developed to prepare the children to fulfil their role in a multicultural British society.

On my last visit to Magda and Albana to discuss the making of a dual language book, they surprised me by jumping up together and very formally and clearly reciting the following poem:

### **Gjuha jonë**

Gjuha jonë sa e mirë!  
 Sa e ëmbel, sa e gjerë!  
 Sa e lehtë, sa e lirë!  
 Sa e bukur, sa e vierë!  
*Our language so beautiful  
 So very sweet and wide  
 So easy, so free  
 So pretty and meaningful*

Naim Frashëri

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